NEON

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Brooklyn, 1956-1959

SUPPLEMENT TO NOW (1958)

NEON ORBIT (1960)

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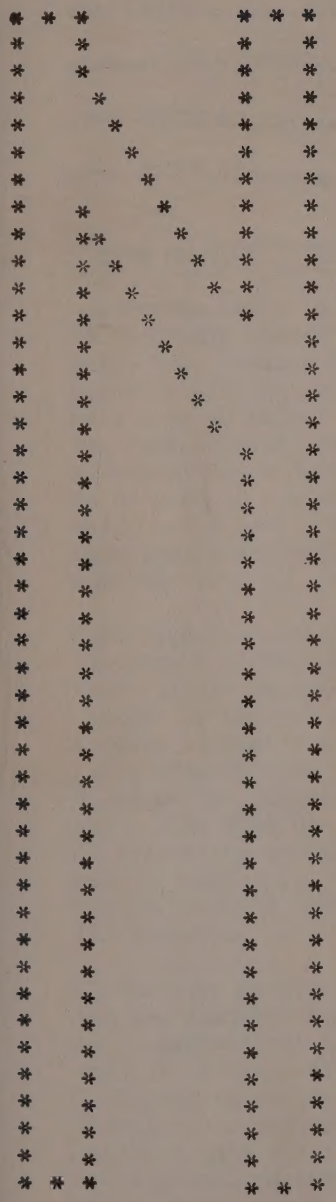

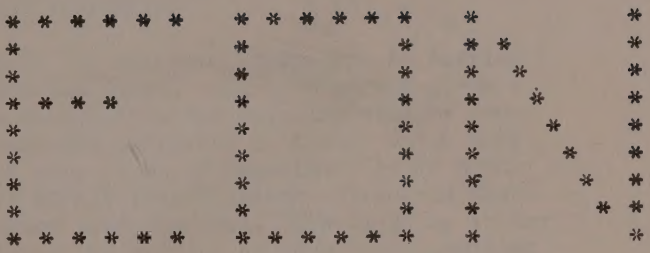

As the sun makes it new

Day by day make it new

Yet again make it new.

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A NOTE ON NEON / GILBERT SORRENTINO

Anyone who tries to start and maintain a magazine in America is virtually doomed from the start. One, because who gives a damn? Two, because the material in the magazine will be compared by all the professional artlovers to things which they have seen in bigger and more renowned magazines; as if nothing ever started, as if HAMLET leaped, Athena-like from Shakespeare's head — all labor pains avoided. NEON is going to try to be sort of a midwife to the writing of young men...writing which would have a hard time being published in the bigger magazines mentioned. " Too much like " or " not enough like" somebody else's...and so doomed with the neat little slip.

This magazine contains the work of a group of young men, each learning his art, each still in a tradition which screams "new", "new" !! and then levels its guns at the newness, because traces of the old remain glued to it. What the tradition forgets is that there is no such thing as a literary broad-jump; without some of the starting line sand clinging to the shoes of the jumper. The point is that I believe that a magazine like NEON has a value; that value lying in the fact that it prints the work of men who see their goal and who have begun to realize it. Work that is still in the process of sloughing off the old CAN have value — both for its creators and its readers.

If the work herein is crude and imperfect, it is that only in the way that the first raw hedges of spring are imperfect; if it is perfect but not "original" (O lovely word!) enough, then it is the perfection of the calm before a cleansing and invigorating storm. The point is that I am printing it because I believe it presages better things, printing it because, God knows, I have nothing to lose in the way of money and nothing to be gained in the way of money. I would like to have readers but I cannot print only what they like. I believe this is a valid magazine and a necessary magazine. It has come out of a society in which art is slowly giving way to artiness.

That alone is enough to commend it.

1956
Bart

::

WILLIAM FLEMING / CANZONE OF THE PRODIGAL YEARS

Et in Arcadia Ego

I

Firstly, I be forlorn
I perceive;
Where now are those
Erstwhile days
When live I was?
The sea-food suppers? Chinese dishes?
The fastidious talk I believe
I beguiled them with?
Therewith the angelic air?
Yes, where?
And what has become of the fellows? - and this is
The worst - the swirl,
The flopping about enlivened with kisses?
- Irrecoverably, gone
Is the god.

In particular, where are the frivolous girls
Half-drunk? - say,
Atthis, Candida, Delysia? - Some
House-bound clod
I fear me they're wedded with
Now! And me? - Like the vassed rose
hideously sighing its last sigh -
I die
of decorum.

II

No, I am not
What I was,
That's true: the best
Of me's dead;
Yes, and the rest
(What's worse) deteeriorates
In pious disinclinations - like this present phase
For the cloth.
It's a damned shame!
Look! More of same!
I, the gallant, planned for, baited
Once, now brood on merely pictures,
Flirt merely now with mental states,
Salacious too: I got,
I guess, deserts;

fleming /

And Holy Meditation just procures,
These days, a holy hell, aforesaid;
Best admit (it cannot be excused
Because it hurts)
I chose this sloth
Myself, it's me. Thus my behest,
resolve me wherefore: what consequence
Is this? what sense
was that? - All is abused.

III

Furthermore THIS - the " special
once ":
- A certain fashionable lady
Knows what I mean -
She bore from me
A wounded soul - deny
Her grasping hands, her wild distress,
Deny her lovely sobbing
If she dare !
There !
Mention the " blue bridge " ! - And I?
Ah, child, I was scared
As well...I heard she aspired
...To religion, and thought that was gentle,
Even MORE sweet...

But what was the truth? - Time was I was lord
In those fond eyes, her green
Shyness was (she was astute)
All for me sweet:
She was all my finishing,
My refining, has that finesse of me entirely,
and now look!
She passes by me, THE SLUT,
not even acknowledging my salute!

IV

Very well then! THIS for the first
qualms !
- As delicious
As spring morning, its gift
Of sunlight and fruit-juice -
Breakfasts
In the sun-room - the warm
Obvious pleasure in their big eyes
When I first assailed them
...but failed them.

fleming /

- Bah! What falls as fast
As the score of years I was
When love walked past!
Now cursed
With sophistical scruples, utterly hypocritical!

And for it is winter days,
Where now is summer, the swift
Summer? Summer surely is matchless,
Unbelievable...
In a noon haze...
On beach-resorts languorous,
lying two together...
As for the weather -
utterly perfect...windless...

V

Thus after all, I suppose, what I was
was better.
The frivolous girls, it seems,
Took age,
Doffed schemes;
And I? Taking a mind to repent,
Assumed the refinements of amendment, took letters;
Enthroned, after a dull dinner,
I sit, expounding Law and Grace:
/ Case-
History/ DIRECTOR OF MANY COMPANIES LAMENTS
LOST MASTERY/ depression / VITAL
DEVELOPMENTAL WORKS HAULTED/ statistics / GOVERNMENTS
PASS/
That's that! - The span.

That is to say, " the title
And measure for purchase " defects, the wage:
Applying, THEN the pleasure inhered merely in being,
Merely substanding the natural man:
NOW - but obsevances, minus the inner
Compulsion of will, distinguished by pitiful dreams.
A befitting guerdon!
Don't build on
borrowed being!

CODA

Confidentially, I don't tru-
ly feel like this any more, you
Know, as I now have a new
Girl - but I used to.

JOHN RICHARDSON/ TWO POEMS

HALF-SONG FOR A BLACK GIRL

My girl knows no moon, although
the moon is no more chaste than she:
the moon ignores our tenement,
wastes her light on cold cement
and ignores the warm black girl who clings to me.

My girl has no song, because
her blackness brings no metaphor
to her lover's lips -- and yet
I would not love her if she were not black as jet.

Perhaps one day I will find
moon and star and song,
and lay them at my black girl's feet --
ending an ancient wrong.

AUTOPSY

See how this man's brain is blackened by thought?
What are these bitter fluids in his brain?
The convolutions are not very plain.
Is this phosphorescence from a book he bought?

Note his ashen intestines, which really ought
to be slimy, red and green. It is plain
that this man was organically insane.
(Doubtlessly some fever his body caught

From his brain). His wrinkled eyes are rolled behind
the labyrinthine distortions of his mind.
Notice the peculiar shape of his head.

I say this man was not altogether there
(note the ellipses of his beard and hair:
such organisms as this are better dead!)

SAM ABRAMS/ THREE POEMS

NOTES ON A CLASSIC CASE

Now I have been gone three years
and remember only details,
the way the lawn was kept so closely trimmed,
I know that I sat with Ben on apier
as he caught the biggest bass of that year,
but all I remember is the splash
as he threw an undersized sunfish back.

In spite of the fields all about us, it was hard,
Late at night we imagined any road
about to receive a neighbor on his way
from any of a dozen places we were aware of.
That is the hardest time of all:
old enough to know that danger exists
and too young to gauge its extent.

It was quite an heroic act all considered,
Our parents still retained an aura
thus remaining so vulnerable to us.
Another thing we didn't know, but if we had
It would have made no difference.
We knew there was a ditch to leap,
what if we imagined it full of water
when it was brimming with blood?

STATUA

The black-clad prince grips tight his sword
behind him, thru a door unopened
for forty years and more
glad sunlight rushes to reclaim the golden hair
and stroke each curl to shining spun:
above which the prince bends hesitant
glances at the inscription once again,
and then more like a hen than a man
bestows her ancient due upon the sleeping girl.

TROY FOREVER FALLING, BURNING

babble of Ajax
Achilles feat

here, the tale of the
hurricane falling outside

remarks of the wind
calling on ears
that can only hear
the final, horrid drag
drag

of Hector's head
trailing in the red dust

once proud two, now with
the refall of towered Ilios
we toy,
      listless among
indifferent days
among songs
that are only noise
        to those who
listened at Dionysus' grave

:: :::::::::: ::::: ::::

GILBERT SORENTINO : A PASTORAL/ PART OF A NOVEL IN PROGRESS

He knew that Ace was there and that Red was driving the car, that he knew. And he knew that there were four girls, one in front and three in the back with him. And he knew that they'd left the apartment sometime in the early morning (still-dark) and that they'd started out for Connecticut or Pennsylvania or Massachusetts or someplace for coffee without the girls, andnow, looking carefully at their faces, he recognized one and thought he had seen the others and slowly it came to him Joey's so that then he figured that Red had stopped in while he was sleeping and had somehow persuaded these four to come with them.

There was a lot of noise in the car (had awakened him, in fact) and everybody had a can of beer open in hand andthe car was sliding from side to side of the road with Red laughing uproariously each time it skiddedon the gravel of the road-shoulder, but nobody seemed to care about Red's laughter or driving, there was just noise coming from all of them, what about he did not know, he only now was beginning to acclimate himself to the fact that they probably really were in Connecticut or Pennsylvania or Massachusetts for coffee -- although that now was absurd, the light in the car surely the sun of afternoon and besides, they all had beer.

He straightened up, pulling his arm out from under one of the girls' legs, the arm asleep and his nerves (raw and crackling already from the cumulative effect of the past week or so of little sleep and less food) leaped, bristling him wide awake at another clamor of noise and shouting and general hilarity provoked by his awakening. Immediately a can of beer was pressed into his hand and he drank from it, neither wanting it nor not wanting it, drinking because it was the only thing possible to do. As he lowered the can, their faces came up

to him suddenly, looming, as if someone had clapped a pair of binoculars to his eyes, then, as suddenly, they blurred and swam together, then loomed brilliantly and grotesquely again and in a panic which seized him (knowing that they were addressing remarks to him -- remarks which his ears could neither segregate nor interpret in the general aural melee) he raised the can again and drank in long, thirsty gulps, relaxing then as he detected finally a phrase actually composed of understandable words. He was alive again.

He lurched then against the girl next to him (another general roar of approval, dismay, derring-do as the car swung and skidded off the road on which they had been traveling onto a poorer, less frequented one) and she put her arm around him and said something about him being a wet blanket and a sonofabitch to just notice her and then he careened again the other way, amazed as he watched the gentle and unreal parabola of a beer can flung by Ace trace itself on the rear window momentarily. Then there were boughs and leaves before his eyes and he heard them slapping and scraping against the sides and windows of the car as Red picked up speed and the car jumped crazily down the road in a shower of pebbles and dust.

It was the beginning (or the middle or the end -- he really would not know until it was over and he had a chance to count the days) of another "weekend" and as the girl kissed him long and hotly there in the back seat, her teeth against his lips as the car bumped and jounced through the ruts of the road, the uproar continuing, he knew that he hadmeant to get away from that apartment and see Pete to tell him --

She was saying something about he could have had plenty of that and more if he'd only been awake and he nodded stupidly, his head banging against the window of the car, the handstrap slapping crazily against his face and a scum of conversation about it being a shame that they hadn't brought along some of the queers reaching him and then she was suffocating and close again andshe kissed him and then after an eternity he was free again. He sat up again and shouted at Ace (the radio, he just noticed, was turned full blast) for a can of beer, because if he had to be here (he felt) he might as well be drunk as be the way he was, feeling unreal and empty, so that he thought if he to set foot on the ground outside the car he would bounce, floatingly, perhaps never come down.

-- because he wanted to see Pete and talk to him and tell him about Vera and how stupid he was to let his goddam pride --

But there was as yet, no opportunity for him to test his fleeting theory, for the car continued to roar ahead, Ace's

face now turned toward his, collapsed and mushy, a foam-topped can of beer issuing from the hand extended before him. Guy took the can and drank again, each swallow making the noise just a little more begrudging, the components which went into making it, a little more discrete. Three, perhaps four of them were singing the old song about the tinker and his kidney-wiper in competition with the radio and Ace looked out the window at the calm fields to the right and below the car, stretching out to a small, lazy river, for the moment imagining the car to be motionless as he looked. She was close again to him and he could feel her breasts perched on either side of his arm like two birds of prey and she was suggesting that he suggest that Red stop the car for a while so they could stretch their legs. He thought, smiling, spread, you mean, as he turned and saw directly before him the mouth, the lipstick thick and cracking slightly, saw it then move in the question, move again from question to smile (lecherous) as he answered nothing.

-- if I could have got away before I got too stoned, I would have made it. Tell him about how stupid it is to let it crumble like that because of his lousy goddam pride; let him know maybe my technique, my surefire technique --

But whether he would have suggested stopping or not ("to stretch their legs") it was unnecessary since as the car shot again into a section of the road narrow and woods-bordered, Ace yelled at Red to stop the goddam thing so they could get out and enjoy the scenery, the criticism bringing another storm of coarse laughter and a few (what would have been embarrassed if there had been any room left for embarrassment among the seven of them) embarrassed giggles. So the car stopped hard on the brake pedal. They got out (by not floating, but certainly feeling weightless and absurd as he stood watching the three girls climbing out of the back seat after him; two of the rear seat girls and the front seat girl went with Ace and Red (the five of them ducking beneath the barbed wire on the other side of the road, Ace last with a half-case of beer under arm), Guy and "his" girl (accepted fact by at least the others if not by Guy) left alone.

She was saying that as long as all of them had got out and had gone into the woods there was really no reason (was there?) for going into the woods themselves, that they might as well be comfortable and stay in the car; these words (which he swore he could have predicted) coming to him as through a haze, since he was thinking wildly --

-- I could maybe get in and drive this heap back to the city and see Pete and talk to him before it's too late, before he or she do something stupid or that they won't want to do, tell him about the only way to ever get up is to --

something /

Set into the car she kept saying from inside, holding a can of beer (treat), turned him on that he felt, standing there, like an animal being tested, looked at her -- smiling what he must have thought via (and perhaps really was) except to say who had seen the smile so many times and who would never as long as he lived dissociate it from those 'Wednesdays' and the silver lights and the waiting for something to happen to him -- the clean pure flame suddenly burning ; -- so that he could get up and walk out (treat), a smiling, irresistible smile, practised before a dozen candy store mirrors from hundreds of rapid faces on the movie magazines; so he did get into the car and she lunged back in her corner vulpinously as she handed him the can of beer, by looking at her and wondering when the hell she was going to test the right hub-driver in cabin or barnacle and get married and remember these glorious days of youth as -- he laughed the beer out in a spray -- poignant memories.

-- by Christ ! he could throw her ass right out of the car and take it back to Pete and just wait till he found him and gave him his keys...because it was important that Pete should know how his system, if there was such a thing as a system, he had found it --

It asked him (actually not what he was laughing at, and he realized that she had unbuttoned her blouse and was doing her best to expose her black-brassiered breasts and he recovered control and told her to button her blouse again. In extreme bewilderment she looked at him and he said that he thought she said she wanted to go for a little walk, stretch her legs, and why didn't she do just that! because he was going to sit and drink beer.

Just dead silence and then Dammit! You Dammit! and she swung and caught him full and stinging on the cheek and he just sat and blinked at her and drank the beer, stuck at all of it, stuck at all because there seemed to end to it, no end to the weekend and the cars and the young and old and middle-aged sluts and whores and queers, but because he was beginning to doubt the eventual salvation (whole-souled and cleansed) from the maelstrom.

Rapid speech from her about what was wrong with her and all he think he was humoring him to somebody and she'd go and tell the others that she'd been left alone with a golden queer, one of them blokes, a golden queer; while he looked at her uncomfortably, at the moment she being like a bottle of whiskey or a can of beer, temporarily diluted to the escapade, but certainly refusable.

But she did not get out of the car while he finished the can of beer and rocked around, did not get out until he had worked his way half-through the next one, then got out staying there until it came to even her not too perceptive mind that he really was going to drink beer, really did not want her, in an embarrassingly gentle show of ignoring her,

slamming the door and walking across the road. He watched her go, a little incredible in her high heels and brown-blown open blouse, watched her reach the fence and haul her skirt up to her thighs as she ducked between two strands of barbed wire with such equanimity that if it had not been for the upheaval he could have taken her for a female duck himself.

— I suppose it won't really hurt to wait another day or so, it's not that important that I tell him — really — not that important that I talk to him right away —

He lighted a cigarette and looked out of the car window at the impenetrable brambles and trees almost leaning against the window on his side. A sudden grasp of dismay as he knew, instinctively, that he would never tell Pete, would probably never even see Pete to tell him...he puffed rapidly at the cigarette, gunning across the road, now anxious to see them appear once more, for the first time in his life afraid to think about the situation in which he found himself — the fear that he would forever sit like this, in cars, rooms, bars, drinking, waiting — for what? Waiting for what? He let his mind go blank and wished he had kept her (what was her name?) in the car with him; better than this. This waiting, as he would wait (unless something happened soon, unless he turned into that goddam horse, colt soon...) forever, as Yahoo as the rest, as terribly aware of it as they were ignorant.

Maybe there is no flare, he thought. Maybe you just reach a point from which you know you can't go any lower, can't be any more of a Yahoo (a qualitative thing, certainly) and then you can get the fuck out. Just step and get out, and step into Nirvana. And telling Pete, saving Pete...that might just be...excitedly he opened another can of beer, leaned forward as if there were someone else in the front seat and said aloud: - That might just be the first step. Tell Pete before he folds up completely, before he loses it all, becomes a Yahoo completely...knows he's a goddam scumbaitch, because has got to happen there, right? (the invisible auditor nods) Something has got to happen with that other joker's baby and she certainly not going back to him, nor him wanting her back, nor him even knowing about the goddam baby — she might do anything. That's what I'll do! The first step! Tell Pete!

It drank fast, the beer spilling from his chin and onto his shirt, already smudged with dirt and lipstick (how many days? he thought, wiping at the wet). But I've got to wait for us to get back to the city — wait for them to get back to the car and get out of here. Wait, wait, wait, while Pete might be doing...

He was genuinely agitated for he saw now (or thought he saw) a way out of this endless grey horror which had become his days and nights for months; a way out which would not only help him escape (which and new) but which would prevent (perhaps) Pete from throwing away love...I could tell him, he thought, about pride anyway and this to kill it and all

yelled again, crazily. - Tell em I'm a motherfucker too. That's great...!! !

- Yeah! Yeah! A motherfuck--. He bent and picked up the csn of beer and ducked, lurchingly, between the barbed wire, disappearing from sight in a moment. Guy slumped forward on the seat cushion and started as he saw his face, smiling sardonically at him from the rear-view mirror.

- Yeah. That's great for laughs, he said to the face.

It had been dark for an hour when he heard the crashing in the woods again and this time he did not have to look (though he did) because he heard the laughter of one of the girls emanating from the clump of indistinguishable bodies at the side of the road. He sat as he had sat most of the afternoon (a little drunk, but not really feeling so -- more like knowing it by taking tally of the beer consumed, measuring it against his capacity); leaning back against the cushions, wondered now vaguely if they would go back to the city (maybe he could get home by midnight...why even home? Just go straight out to Pete's room...) now, or stay here -- forever (?)

They reached the car almost simultaneously, a parody of humanity, funny in that incredible and outrageous way which eventually negates humor, all of them drunk, dishevelled, smeared with dirt and dust and lipstick. One of the girls stared at him from behind a swollen and already blackening cheek and Yo chanted unceasingly (frighteningly decorated with the visible clues of the ordeal (?) through which she had just gone), in a mimicry of the childhood refrain Guy is a quee--er, Guy is a quee--er...Ace and Red climbed into the front seat, kicking loudly the empty cans into the road, pulling the bruised-faced girl after them, the other three girls getting as before, into the back with Guy. In a moment the radio was on (full blast) and the car started down the road in a jackrabbit leap, Guy staring out the window at the darkened woods.

For fifteen or twenty minutes they drove, the car filled again with uproar, augmented by Yo's diatribes, delivered in rapid-fire, afainst Guy and all queers, Ac e roaring her voice continuously into insignificance, prompting louder delivery of her polemic; and on and on till Guy thought (coolly -- this, though he did not know it at the time, being the ultimate low, the final bottom) that surely something had to happen to bring a shred of quiet to the car or it would disappear in a cloud of smoke as fantastic as its noise and occupants.

In a lull (comparative) he managed to shout to Ace the question:

- We going home, Ace?

And the answer:

- Home? Gonna get some coffee!

And so that was that and he sat back again, allowing himself to lapse into that world which had now (in its intanibility become daydream) sealed itself off from him, into which he

had found (anywhere, anyhow) neither door nor crack to enter.
The car leaned and skidded onto the main highway, six voices raised in loud enjoyment, one pair of eyes glued (unseeingly) to the sky, bright with a moon.

::

J.J. FREIWALD / POEM & PROSE POEM

(AND EVERYMAN CAN SING)

Time lay motionless in the palm of my sweaty hand. And slept for awhile, while the heat of the day exhausted itself upon the earth. Still the men in the dug-by-hand trenches worked on, with pick an' shovel. Then it was my turn with the pick, and I had to put time away in my pocket. But he wasn't disturbed much by the transfer. He did turn over once or twice and then went right back to his soundless, soft sleep. And I picked into the sun-hot earth. We all were sweating like mad even the picks and shovels. Even the butcher's-boy breeze that blew over from the west was hell-hot, an' its wetness madeour pants stick to our legs. And we waited for time to wake an' tell us all to go home. Then the sun was hidden by a colorless cloud, and time yawned, and we all dropped our picks and shovels, an' ran to our waiting cars, and left. Like birds before the baying dog, and time before happiness. We left! To the dark almost black bars, where we could wash in the cool of brown beers. Where we could tell sometimes true stories. Where there were women who would laugh and listen, and sometimes smile. But they would always know that we were the diggers of holes, but they'd listen and sometimes laugh. If you bought them a brown beer. Then we'd go home to sleep and smoke, to dream an' wait. To wait for a girl, then get tired and dream of tomorrows. Tomorrows that come but once. Once in a time, then being too tired. Then to smoke a good night cigarette, while dreaming of being the lone ranger. And wondering what happened to radio Bill's other wife. They were really happy when I was twelve. Somewhere in the middle of Bill's other wife I heard a gunshot, coming from downstairs. And yelled for them to play the god-dam television lower. And they did, which is strange cause they're always rooted to their chairs and never hear anything you might scream at them. Then she played Bach's "Jesus, Thy Joy and Thy Salvation," just the first 10 or 12 bars. And the man over the T.V. said, "Now we present this is your life louie cohen, inventor of the gas chamber. But first a word from our sponsor, the Lutheran Church of the World." And I slept soundly, but shortly.

freiwald /

POEM

See, cried the not hawk, thundering in the sky.
As the loon dipped, dartingly into view,
And four flying blackbirds flew to their nest.
Kill the pest cried Mrs Smith, and her husband
Ran to get the gun which hung just under
The picture of a mary.
But the slow silent fog blocked his view, and
Chuckling to himself passed on to make the
Black of the night all white, (if he could).

::

NOEL STOCK/ TWO POEMS

FANFARE

Pale Winter light sours a vacant lot.
The sun's-glint-on-a-tobacco-tin
Is afire with
Desire for words -

Leap to reach
across the intervening

To its other perfection
which is speech.

Patches on the pants of urchins
Who scatter as I reach to grasp.

Hence these confections, proffered in one hand
While the other bides its time.

SHIP'S DINING ROOM: PRIMA CLASSA

Four sit nearby, talking of art and artists.
Dialogue, so musty and cold so many
years ago, is attractive to certain minds: so
that, at our morning-

tea, at lunch and dinner (especially at
dinner) nothing
nothing but art. Of so-and-
so and his pet cat; and of Brahms; of men long
dead and immortal,

stock/

dung for Europe's dung-heap rotating round the
world. And so has History passed them by, time
after time; nor our intercession save them:
pride is the worst of

all. The waiter passes between, plates are
clattering, "...H. Lawrence...de Sade...", then laughter,
coop, and female; then: "...is it any wonder
art has a bad name?"

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NEON is a magazine published by and for young writers who are doing work of worth and value but who find it difficult to find space in the larger, more well-established magazines. There is no editorial policy other than the singular one of sincere and growing writing: mss. accepted with the usual stamped, self-addressed envelope enclosed/no payment available at the present time.
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